

DESERT TORTOISE
(MOJAVE POPULATION)
(*Gopherus* { = *Xerobates*, = *Scaptochelys* } *agassizii*)

STATUS: Threatened (55 FR 12178, April 2, 1990) with critical habitat (59 FR 5820, February 8, 1994; 59 FR 9032, February 24, 1994).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Large (shell length up to 38 cm (15 in) long), herbivorous reptile with a domed shell and round, stumpy hind legs. The Mojave population is most active during the spring and early summer when annual plants are most common. Additional activity occurs during warmer fall months and after summer rain storms. The remainder of the year is spent in burrows.

HABITAT: Occurs in the creosote shadscale, blackbush, and Joshua tree series of Mojave desert scrub, cactus, shadscale, and Joshua tree series of Mojave desert scrub. The Mojave population generally occupies desertscrub communities in basins and bajadas but is also found on rocky slopes. In Arizona, tortoises of the Mojave population are typically found below 1,220 m (4,000 ft).

RANGE: Historic: Occurred in a variety of desert communities in southeastern California, southern Nevada, northwestern Arizona, and southwestern Utah.

Current: It is still distributed throughout the historic range, but populations are fragmented and declining.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: Threatened due to loss and degradation of habitat, illegal collection and vandalism, disease (Upper Respiratory Tract Disease), and predation of juveniles by common ravens. Causes of the habitat loss include road, housing, and energy development; conversion of habitat to agriculture; overgrazing; and off-road vehicle use.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, the State of Arizona, and private.

NOTES: A Recovery Plan was completed in June 1994.

Listed as a Species of Special Concern by the State of Arizona.